

JPL hazardous waste handling is updated

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To comply with increasingly tougher federal government regulations, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory is constructing a new facility for hazardous waste and cryogenic gas.

"Regulations have expanded in the last 10 years," said James J. McKenna, hazardous materials engineer for JPL's Occupational Safety division.

"We've looked at the changes coming through the pipe, looked at the future, and we've designed a facility to meet those needs," said McKenna, who will manage the facility.

JPL presently has two buildings in which to store the materials. Both were built in the 1950s and no longer conform to code safety requirements.

Fred W. Sanders, manager of JPL's Occupational Safety, said storage facilities are like freeways.

"They can become out of date, and we didn't want that to happen."

Groundbreaking for the 4,800 square foot facility was last month.

The \$1.1 million facility will be on the northeast portion of JPL's property. It should be completed in late July or early August.

The project was studied several years before the facility was approved by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

All of the construction will be done by private contractors.

The single-story building will consist of concrete floors, masonry walls, spillage drains, fire and sprinkler alarm systems.

The building will have two parts, explained McKenna.

One portion will be used for cryogenic or compressed gases such as oxygen, argon, helium and nitrogen, McKenna said.

These materials will be stored in containers holding approximately 200 cubic feet of each material.

The hazardous material section consists of five rooms, including four storage rooms.

Each room will have such materials as flammables and solvents, corrosives, poisons and oxidizers and miscellaneous chemicals.

Most of the hazardous material comes from chemicals used by in-house painters, carpenters and plumbers, the future manager said.

The hazardous waste area has three main purposes, including in-house recycling, outside recycling and disposal.

If the materials can be recycled on site, that is JPL's first option, McKenna said.

"It's costly to have the chemicals taken away, and we try to avoid the landfills as much as possible," he said.

About 75 percent of the chemicals are used by other scientists on site or by outside recyclers.

If the chemical can't be recycled on-site, then they look off-site for someone who can use it.

JPL's license only allows them to

to keep chemicals on-site for more than 90 days.

JPL also isn't licensed to dispose or treat chemicals, McKenna said.

Therefore, if the material isn't recycled it's taken by an outside firm to be either incinerated or buried.

The hazardous waste is usually kept in containers made of glass or polyethylene, McKenna said.

Each room is monitored 24 hours a day seven days a week by security alarms.

If a spill occurs, the JPL fire department responds within about one minute, McKenna said.

JPL has never experienced a hazardous material spill, and Sanders is hopeful there never will be one.

"In the real world, there's no such thing as absolutes," he said.

"But we feel the new facility is as safe as could be."

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Shuttle: Clandestine mission ready

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — A clandestine countdown advanced smoothly Monday toward a fiery pre-dawn liftoff Thursday of space shuttle Atlantis with five military astronauts and a spy satellite.

"You wouldn't believe how smooth it is," said NASA spokeswoman Lisa Malone. "The count picked up right on time without a hitch Sunday night and we've had no problems." Shuttle forecasters said the weather outlook was 60 percent favorable for a launch Thursday.